



## **Guidelines to the 'For Men To Talk about Autism' virtual peer support meetings**

Participating in the 'For Men To Talk about Autism' virtual peer support meetings can be a beneficial experience for autistic individuals. These meetings provide a platform for social interaction, shared experiences, and a sense of community. Here are some guidelines specifically tailored for autistic men, men with autistic family members or men who are awaiting an autism diagnosis to enhance their engagement and comfort during virtual peer support meetings:

### **Create a Comfortable Environment**

Find somewhere where you will not be disturbed or with minimal distractions for you and the other participants. Use earphones or headphones if you can so that only you can hear what is being said more clearly.

In a noisy environment, you may find it beneficial to mute yourself when you are not talking. This avoids your image being broadcasted to the front of the screen and makes it easier for others to listen without distraction.

### **Prepare for the 'For Men to Talk about Autism' virtual meetings**

Check that your internet connection and any necessary software or applications are working and completed earlier in the day.

Although the meeting starts at 6pm, you can join at any point after that time.

If arriving before 6pm, you will be placed in a holding room until the host starts the meeting and you will be moved to the main meeting room.

If joining after 6pm, you will be placed in a holding room and will be indicated to the host, who will then allow you into the main room.

In the holding room, you will be asked to test your microphone, camera and speakers, this could include your earphones or headphones, to avoid technical issues during the meeting. Please note that if you set the microphone high you will be able to speak more quietly during the meeting if required.

### **Respect Confidentiality**

Remember that peer support meetings often involve personal stories and experiences.

Respect the privacy and confidentiality of others by not sharing their information outside of the meeting.



### **Communication**

There are no rules to communication, you can say nothing, or as little or as much as you want. This can be via speech or the chat function.

### **Use Visual Supports**

If it helps, use visual supports like notes, diagrams, or mind maps to organise your thoughts and contribute to the discussion.

### **Practice Active Listening**

With some autistic traits, it may give the impression that some men are not listening. Some may demonstrate active listening by nodding and/or making eye contact without thinking.

For autistic people, this may not come naturally, but do try to look towards the screen if you can. However, it's important to emphasise that attendees may well be listening without looking at the camera.

You can also use the 'reactions' icons or even just nod, cheer with your hands, or applaud.

You may try to adjust your face to show interest with what you are thinking or feeling.

### **Manage Turn-Taking**

With some autism traits, it can be difficult to judge when to talk. This can lead to interruptions, too many speaking at once or even not speaking at all. To avoid this:

Place your hand up or wave if you want to contribute to what what has just been said.

Use the virtual hand symbol if you would like to talk. To do this click on 'Reactions' and then 'Raise Hand'. You may be placed in a queuing system (see the number on your 'Raise Hand').

Please 'Lower Hand' once you have spoken.

### **Participate Respectfully**

Be respectful of others' perspectives and experiences, even if they differ from your own.

No two autistic people are the same and experiences/attitudes will differ, including pre-diagnosis and diagnosis of autism.

Avoid interrupting and maintain a positive and inclusive attitude.



### **Use Nonverbal Cues**

If you are comfortable, use nonverbal cues like thumbs up, clapping, or raising your hand to show agreement, appreciation, or interest. You can also use the virtual icons which you can access by clicking 'reactions'.

### **Keep Contributions Concise**

Try to share your thoughts in a clear and concise manner. This helps maintain the flow of the conversation and ensures that everyone has an opportunity to speak.

### **Ask for Clarification**

If you are unsure about something that was said or discussed, do not hesitate to ask for clarification. It is fine to seek more information to fully understand the topic.

### **Take Breaks as Needed**

Virtual meetings can sometimes be overwhelming. If you start to feel overwhelmed or fatigued, it's fine to take a short break and return when you are ready. You may feel like turning off your camera for a while so you can relax.

### **Reflect and Self-Care**

After the meeting, take some time to reflect on the discussions and how they made you feel. Engaging in self-care activities afterward can help you process and recharge.

Remember, everyone's experience is unique. The goal is to create an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can benefit from the 'For Men To Talk about Autism' peer support meeting.

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